

OVID
METAMORPHOSES

BOOK XIII

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INTRODUCTION

1. METAMORPHOSIS

All three canonical ancient epics include metamorphoses. These consist chiefly of gods disguising themselves as humans, but there are others too.¹ On a more general level, the *Iliad* tells of Achilles' conversion from wrath to reconciliation; in the *Odyssey* Odysseus, a master of disguise, deception and dissimulation, is successively leader of men, wanderer, beggar and king. The *Aeneid* accounts for the metamorphosis of Rome from its small beginnings to world domination.² But although it is possible to see transformation as one aspect of their epics, neither Homer nor Virgil had emphasised that theme. The *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* are instead closely bound up with the idea of permanence: they are monumental poems which exist to memorialise their subjects with changeless glory and an immortal name.

Ovid was not the first to write in hexameters about transformation: the Hellenistic Greek poets Nicander and Boeus or Boeo had respectively compiled *Metamorphoses* (*Heteroeumena*) and *Origins of birds* (*Ornithogonia*), Parthenius in the first century BC had written *Metamorphoses* probably in verse (*SH* 636–7), and in Latin Aemilius Macer, an older friend of Ovid's, had written or translated a work on avian transformation.³ Ovid was, however, the first to treat metamorphosis at such a length as to invite comparison with previous great epics. His poem has no central human protagonists, but instead celebrates *mutatas . . . formas* and *noua . . . corpora*:

in noua fert animus mutatas dicere formas
corpora. di, coeptis (nam uos mutastis et illa)⁴

¹ *Il.* 24.614–17, *Od.* 13.154–78. In the *Odyssey* Proteus is a shapeshifter and Circe transforms Odysseus' companions into swine.

² Hardie (1992), esp. 62.

³ *Tr.* 4.10.43–4; see Courtney, *FLP* 292–9. Myers (1994) 22–5 has a useful survey of pre-Ovidian metamorphosis literature.

⁴ On *illa* see p. 4 n. 11 below. *illa* (sc. *coepta*) is poorly attested but has been accepted in preference to *illas* by most recent scholars because it makes *et* much easier to translate and involves the poet himself in metamorphosis: Kenney (1976). See however Lee (1993).

adspirare meis, primaque ab origine mundi
ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen. (1.1–4)

noua implies the strangeness and suddenness of transformation, but it refers also to the novelty of Ovid's approach to epic. *perpetuum* suggests both the temporal continuity of a narrative which moves from the creation of the world to the present, and the conventional epic aspirations to immortality mentioned above. *animus*, playfully alluding to the first word of the *Iliad*,⁵ and *mutatas . . . formas*, a reference to the word *polytropon*, 'of many turns', applied to Odysseus in the first line of the *Odyssey*, together make the point that this poem will rival earlier epics. The subject-matter, then, will be radically different, but the scale and scope will still be grand. Here in the opening lines are already represented two different perspectives on the poem: formally it is another epic, grand and sublime (echoes of Homer), yet it proclaims at the outset its novelty and innovation. The word *perpetuum* suggests linear development and smooth chronological progression; but its juxtaposition with *deducite*, a term familiar from neoteric poetry,⁶ creates an allusion to a famous passage of Callimachus' *Aetia* in which the poet refuses to write 'one continuous song in many thousands of verses' (fr. 1.3–4): any perpetuity or continuousness claimed by this 'song' will be, at the least, ironised and paradoxical.⁷ Callimachean, too, is Ovid's organisation by theme rather than by hero: the long elegiac *Aetia*, similarly episodic, claimed to give explanations for Greek customs and rituals. The *Metamorphoses* both perpetuates and gives new shape to the epic form; and the genre, transmuted, retains many of its former characteristics.

Almost every episode concludes with or involves a transformation, but the ways in which the subject is treated are highly diverse. Some metamorphoses are described at length, others perfunctorily; some are central, others incidental, to their stories; some humans are changed into animals, others into inanimate objects, while yet others become gods or stars; some are transformed by way of punishment for, others as escape from, terrible crimes; some receive peculiarly

⁵ μῆνιν, 'anger'. *animosus* is used of Achilles at *Ep.* 8.1, *Hor. Sat.* 1.7.12.

⁶ See Coleman on *Virg. Ecl.* 6.5. ⁷ Kenney (1976) 51–2.

appropriate transformations which perpetuate their human traits, while others do not. The metamorphoses in Book 13 exemplify this variety. The transformation of Ajax into a hyacinth, the climax of an episode almost four hundred lines long, is neither particularly appropriate for Ajax nor elaborately treated. Hecuba's metamorphosis into a dog is described in such a way as to emphasise the continuing nature of her anger. The battling of memnon-birds at the pyre of their ancestor provides an aetiology for observable phenomena in the natural world. The miraculous transformative gifts of Anius' daughters are the cause of their metamorphosis. Acis' conversion into a river is suited to the watery context. The merman's tale provides a humorous aetiology for his merman's tail. In every book of the poem the theme of change is treated with ceaselessly inventive variety.

Such transformations of shape and appearance are Ovid's professed subject. But the long speech of Pythagoras, prominently placed at the beginning of the final book, invites a wider view of metamorphosis and raises perpetual change to the level of a universal principle. As evidence for constant flux Pythagoras cites the alternation of day and night, the waxing and waning of the moon, the procession of the seasons, the ageing of human bodies, the interchangeability of earth, air, fire and water, gradual alteration in the appearance of places, the mutual encroachment of sea and land, various natural phenomena (clashing rocks, volcanoes, bear-cubs licked into shape, the reborn phoenix, sexually mutating hyaenas, etc.), and the fact that great cities perish and new powers arise. The doctrine of metempsychosis or transmigration of the soul, fundamental to Pythagoreanism, is another aspect of this principle. Now Romans knew well that different perspectives can reveal the world as essentially unchanging or as constantly in flux. The human race continues, though human lives have only a brief duration. A continuing sense of self subsists within our bodies, which however deteriorate, imperceptibly but inexorably, from youth to age. The river that we cross each day is called by the same name, but its water is different water. These and similar observations were familiar truths and familiar paradoxes long before Ovid. But although it is unscientific and humorously framed with references to eccentric vegetarianism, and despite the

fact that the philosopher's voice is by no means to be confused with that of the author,⁸ Pythagoras' speech gives prominence to a way of looking at the world which is clearly congenial, appropriate, relevant and interesting for the *Metamorphoses*. And if the transformations catalogued by Ovid, simple for the most part and irreversible, are only one aspect of a world of constant mutability, oscillation, discontinuity and transmutation, then it would seem beneficial to take a broad view of what constitutes metamorphosis within the poem. A treatise on fallacies need not be false, nor a book on antiquities old; but in the case of the *Metamorphoses* readers are explicitly invited to consider both form and content in light of the poem's theme.

The metaphorical relationship between the *Metamorphoses* and its subject can be explored in a variety of ways. Such words as *forma*, *species*, *figura*, *mutare*, *fieri* and *uertere* take on a charged meaning,⁹ so that a change of mind,¹⁰ a change of clothing, a vacillating woman, a transference of power, a capricious tyrant, a *bouleversement* of expectations, a fluctuation in political affairs, can all be seen as part of a metamorphic world-view. The genre, too, has received a new form; and Ovid, himself a convert from elegy to epic,¹¹ ceaselessly varies the tone both within and between episodes. In a society where *res nouae* meant 'revolution' and change was associated with disturbance of the ordained state of affairs, a poem proclaiming *noua ... corpora* and *mutatas ... formas* may fitly be called radical. Emphasis on relativism, contingency and variability, albeit with reference for the most part to mythological events,¹² could be read as disconcertingly revisionist: *mutatas ... formas* marks not only the reform of epic, but also perhaps the possibility of a change of order, of political reformation. Nothing – even Rome itself – continues the same for long.

Yet some things may be said to stay the same:¹³ even in this world of flux, both literal and metaphorical, there may be some permanence. Ovid proclaims at the end of the poem his own immortal

⁸ Barchiesi (1989) 111–12.

⁹ Anderson (1963), Tissol (1997).

¹⁰ Skulsky (1981).

¹¹ If *illa* is to be read in line 2. See p. 1 n. 4. In the exile poetry Ovid points also to his *change* of fortune: *Tr.* 1.1.119–20; cf. 4.1.99.

¹² Cf., however, 1.200–5.

¹³ *Contra* Tissol (1997) 193.

name, which will survive through the generations (15.871–9).¹⁴ More generally, by providing aetiological explanations for enduring human characteristics or animal species, for example, the poem may be said to present a fresh insight into the underlying nature of things.

Stories of transformation can revolutionise the way in which we look at the world. One aspect of this is the revival of dead metaphors. We conventionally say that flowers nod, people are flinty-hearted, sleep overpowers, a river is raging, an act is sheer madness; many stories of metamorphosis make literal such expressions, and provide a new perspective on how things are. Metaphors taken from inanimate nature and used to characterise the human world, and (vice versa) anthropomorphising metaphors applied to the world of nature, are revealed in this poem to be peculiarly apt: metaphor and simile, figures generally assumed to disclose a likeness in unlike things, are shown to display a fundamental truth about the world, and nature to bear permanent witness to human suffering and passion.¹⁵

If metaphor is to be classed as a type of metamorphosis and figurative language is a sort of transfiguration, then a connexion can be made between the style and rhetoric of the poem and its subject. Critics following Seneca have noted Ovid's fascination with figures and tropes,¹⁶ with the pointed *sententiae* of the schools of rhetoric in which he had his education, with his desire to say *idem aliter*. These characteristics of his style are apparent throughout the *Metamorphoses*, and are most openly deployed in the set speeches of Ajax and Ulysses in Book 13.¹⁷ The principle of rhetorical variation and figurative expression could, however, be said to pervade not only individual sentences, but also episodes and the relations between them. The story of Narcissus and Echo enacts on a narrative level the figure of gemination or anaphora, syllepsis or zeugma, as Echo repeats

¹⁴ But this claim is both unverifiable and ironically qualified: Ovid's name will survive *if the prognostications of poets are correct* (*siquid habent veri uatum praesagium*). This might seem like an affirmative if-clause ('if <as is actually the case>': 733–4n.); but at line 155 of the same book Pythagoras (who himself has a vatic stance) poured scorn on the subject-matter of *uates*.

¹⁵ Tissol (1997).

¹⁶ I.e., like Ulysses, he is *polytropos*: cf. p. 18.

¹⁷ See pp. 16–18.

the words of her beloved;¹⁸ the similar but varied tales on a theme told by Orpheus in Book 10 are a sort of narrative polyptoton; prosodic and semantic variation are paralleled on the larger scale by variation of tone, pace and subject between narratives; the silence of a metamorphosed Niobe enacts aposiopesis; inset narratives are parentheses (a figure much affected by Ovid);¹⁹ the tumid river Achelous and the garrulous Nestor represent redundancy or pleonasm; allusive summaries of better-known tales are a form of narrative ellipsis;²⁰ juxtaposed tales on closely related themes figure hendiadys, contrasting tales oxymoron; Fames, Somnus, Invidia and Fama are personifications on a large scale.²¹ Passages of transition between tales have a function comparable to that of conjunctions, pointing logical consequence (= *ergo*), adversative relation (= *sed* or *at non*), similarity (= *non aliter*), etc.; stories, like the clauses and sentences of which they are formed, can have a co-ordinate or subordinate relation with one another. It would be possible to construct a grammar of Ovidian narrative along these lines.

2. STRUCTURE AND THEMES

With the universal and all-embracing grandeur of the epic poet, Ovid claims to write about events *prima . . . ab origine mundi | ad mea . . . tempora* (1.3–4). The poem fulfils this claim by beginning with an account of the creation, proceeding to the Myth of Ages, the Flood, and the regeneration of mankind by Deucalion and Pyrrha, and concluding, from Book 12 onwards, with ‘historical’ time (the Trojan War, Aeneas, Roman stories, Caesar, Augustus). But many of the stories inherited or adapted by Ovid were fixed to no particular time, and could be placed wherever the poet chose. Although he follows epic convention in dividing his poem into books,²² he often makes an episode straddle book-divisions: the Judgement of Arms,

¹⁸ Rosati (1983).

¹⁹ Von Albrecht (1964).

²⁰ See n. 24.

²¹ Generally on this topic see Tissol (1997) 18–26; on figures Wills (1996).

²² The Homeric book-divisions were in fact made centuries after the time of Homer, but about 200 years before Ovid.

for example, is introduced at the end of Book 12, and Glaucus' tale continues into Book 14. The *Metamorphoses* is continuous (*perpetuum* 1.4) in that it has chronological progression and has its tales linked by passages of transition; but at the same time it is discontinuous, in that it does not focus on a single period, place, king or hero. As the world seems from one perspective constantly in flux but from another reassuringly stable, so the *Metamorphoses* can justifiably be called unified or diverse in theme, coherent or heterogeneous in structure, linear or complex in development. There is evidence to support each of these, and many other, analyses of the poem. Convention divides distance into units of standard length, but travellers observe no correspondence between the landscape traversed and the number and position of milestones along their way. Readers of the *Metamorphoses* observe division into books and chronological progression, but these things seem not to help greatly towards an appreciation of the whole.²³

Analogies of this kind are always imprecise, and can be misleading. But the analogy with a journey is suitable at least in the case of 13.622–14.608, where Ovid's narrative travels alongside that of Virgil, and the transitions from one story of metamorphosis to another are in some cases effected by passages of allusive summary which rely on readers' knowledge of the *Aeneid*.²⁴ Ovid hurries past episodes already familiar and dwells instead on characters and aspects of the myth not treated by Virgil. This technique of expansion or contraction of inherited material is typical of Ovid's practice in the *Metamorphoses*.

Another form of transition used in Book 13 is explicit contrast. In lines 572–6 we learn that the gods pitied Hecuba, *but* that Aurora was too preoccupied to feel pity (*non uacat Aurorae*); at lines 623–4 a similar transitional sentence says that the Fates did *not* destroy the hopes of Troy (*non tamen euersam . . .*). Such transitions as these, of which there are many in the poem,²⁵ draw attention to the principle of variety and discontinuity, and make explicit the manipulative

²³ On transitions between books see further 11.

²⁴ Cf. 382–98, 558–64, 623–31, 705–18nn. On the Ovidian *Aeneid* see Hinds (1998) 103–22.

²⁵ See 576n., Solodow (1988) 43–4.

character of the omnipresent and prestidigitatory²⁶ narrator, who can with equal ease stitch together episodes seamlessly or set them against each other with perfunctory whimsicality.

Division into books may be a less marked principle of organisation than others in the poem, but it does invite readers to see whether the stories in each are a coherent group. An attempt to do this for Book 13 reveals several common themes. It is possible, for example, to see an emphasis on speeches of persuasion (serious: Ajax and Aurora; humorous: Polyphemus and Glaucus), or to see the book as framed by pairs of speeches which attempt to persuade (Ajax, Ulysses; Polyphemus, Glaucus), or as organised around a series of deaths (Ajax, Astyanax, Polyxena, Polydorus, Polymestor, Acis). The Judgement of Arms and Hecuba episodes are linked by the motif of deception; Hecuba, Aurora and Anius by parental love; Anius' daughters, Galatea and Scylla by unwelcome suitors; Aurora and Anius by mourning; Memnon, the Coroni and Anius' daughters by transformation into birds; Ajax and the Coroni by suicide. But these themes and motifs are common to other books, and there seems no particular reason why an analysis of them should confine itself to Book 13. More particular to that book, perhaps, is a journey through earlier literature parallel to the temporal and spatial progression of the narrative: the Judgement of Arms was an episode from the Epic Cycle and stands in place of the *Iliad*,²⁷ Hecuba's revenge is based chiefly on a tragedy by Euripides, and the Polyphemus and Galatea episode is inspired by Theocritus. But this superficially neat schema is disrupted by the fact that Aurora and Memnon are associated with the Cycle, and that Anius is from the *Aeneid*. Alternatively, one could view the first part of the book, including Hecuba, as inspired by the Cycle and the second part as arranged (with insets) around the formal framework of the *Aeneid*;²⁸ but that scheme does not take account

²⁶ Quint. 4.1.77 *illa uero frigida et puerilis est in scholis adfectatio, ut ipse transitus efficiat aliquam utique sententiam et huius uelut praestigiae plausum petat, ut Ovidius lasciuire in Metamorphosesin solet*. ('There is indeed a pedantic and childish affectation in vogue in the schools of marking the transition by some epigram and seeking to win applause by this feat of legerdemain. Ovid is given to this form of affectation in his *Metamorphoses*' – trans. Butler (1921–2).)

²⁷ See p. 10.

²⁸ See pp. 22–3, 30–2, 35.

3. LINES 1–398: THE JUDGEMENT OF ARMS 9

of the fact that the Judgement of Arms is more like a tragic *agōn* than anything in epic, and that the seeds of the Hecuba story are to be found already in the *Aeneid*.²⁹ Further details of the sources for episodes in Book 13 may be found below (pp. 9–43).

All stories in the poem have equal status, since all have the common denominator of its subject, metamorphosis. Some are longer than others, but none is explicitly privileged. Because hints towards a construction of meaning are absent, each reading of the poem can be a new exercise in association. The Judgement of Arms, for example, can relate to the story of Hyacinthus, as ending with transformation into a hyacinth; or to Midas, as showing the catastrophic effects of faulty judgement; or to Myrrha and her nurse, as exemplifying shameful persuasion; or to the Lapiths and Centaurs, as standing in place of battle narrative; or to Pyramus, as ending with self-immolation; or to Pythagoras, as consisting of lengthy direct speech; or to Arachne and Actaeon, as involving the reader in evaluation of opposed cases. Similarly Galatea can be variously associated with other tales, depending on whether one emphasises her rejection of her suitor, her speaking in confidence to a sympathetic listener, or the combination of love and violence in her story. The principle of change thus inevitably extends to readers' responses: analyses of the poem are always vulnerable to counter-examples, and those critics tend to be more convincing who speak of its complexity and openness than those who highlight a particular theme. Division of the *Metamorphoses* into pentads or triads of books, or into sections on the divine and the human, or analyses which see as dominating themes love or the conflict between gods and mortals or the anxieties of the artist or natural philosophy or aetiology or Augustanism or anti-Augustanism – all, though convincing in parts, do not seem to measure up to the experience of reading the poem in its proliferating diversity.

3. LINES 1–398: THE JUDGEMENT OF ARMS

The first episode of Book 13 is the Judgement of Arms, a lengthy pair of speeches by Ajax and Ulysses followed by a very brief descrip-

²⁹ See pp. 22–3.

tion of the defeated Ajax' transformation into a hyacinth. Book 12 opened with the gathering of the Greek expedition to Troy, and what stands between that point and 13.622 is Ovid's equivalent of the Homeric poems. He avoids direct comparison. In place of the Iliadic battle narratives he puts the grotesquely and parodically bloody battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs, which culminates in the curious death of the invulnerable Lapith Caeneus, a sort of equivalent for Hector. The fall of Troy and death of Achilles are described at the end of the book, and next comes the Judgement of Arms. It is a battle of words, similar in length to the physical battle of the preceding book, *uerba* for *facta*. The story of the Lapiths and Centaurs had there been narrated by Nestor, and at its end he had been reproved by Tlepolemus for omitting to tell of the important part played by Hercules. Attention is drawn to the speaker's unreliability; and the importance of assessing evidence and not taking everything at face value is a theme which is to be important in the Judgement of Arms.³⁰

By Ovid's time the debate over the arms of Achilles was a commonplace of the schools of rhetoric, where the arguments on each side had been rehearsed innumerable times. What was, and is, of interest to Ovid's readers is not the arguments themselves, but the fresh rhetorical variations and emphases imparted to this familiar theme. However, to clarify the mythological background and the references to earlier episodes, something must first be said about the characters of Ajax and Ulysses (Odysseus) as Ovid found them in the literary tradition.

Ajax and Ulysses

In the *Iliad* Ajax is characterised as a mighty warrior, among the Greeks second only to Achilles in fighting qualities.³¹ In the absence of Achilles he fights a duel with Hector, and is not defeated.³² He is particularly prominent in defending the ships when Achilles' absence results in a desperate rearguard action.³³ Odysseus is a warrior of the first rank and a wise and diplomatic figure, but in battle he is not so

³⁰ See p. 63, 181–204nn. ³¹ *Il.* 3.226–9, 2.768–9.

³² See 82–97n. §3. ³³ See 82–97n. §4.

distinguished as Ajax. He is given the stock epithet ‘cunning’ or ‘wily’,³⁴ an aspect of his character which shows itself for example in a night raid on the Trojan camp which he makes with Diomedes:³⁵ clearly this aspect of Odysseus was well known to the poet of the *Iliad*, though he chose not to emphasise it. In the *Odyssey* Odysseus’ wiliness and trickery are much more prominent, though he is a brave and skilful fighter when occasion demands.

For purposes of comparison between Ajax and Odysseus, those Homeric episodes are most revealing in which the two appear together.

(a) In Book 9 of the *Iliad* Ajax and Odysseus are sent on an embassy to persuade Achilles to accept compensation from Agamemnon and return to battle. Odysseus makes a long conciliatory speech (225–306), which Achilles vehemently rebuts with a speech of even greater length (308–429); by way of preface he hints at Odysseus’ reputation with the words ‘I hate with a deadly hatred the man who thinks one thing and says another’ (312–13). After an even lengthier attempt at persuasion by Phoenix, equally unsuccessful (430–619), Ajax utters a much briefer and blunter speech, full of indignation at Achilles’ stubbornness (624–42). Although this attempt at conciliation, too, is a failure, there is a clear contrast between the reception which Achilles accords it (644–5) and his scornful words to the diplomatic Odysseus (308–13). The episode emphasises the difference between Ajax and Odysseus in the deployment of *uerba*. It provides, too, a striking contrast with the reception given to the two speeches in Ovid.

(b) At *Il.* 11.411–88 Ajax rescues Odysseus when he is oppressed by weight of numbers.³⁶ Odysseus has up to that point been fighting with great vigour, and has been wounded; but mighty Ajax is described as causing immediate panic among the Trojans, who scatter when he appears (485–6). Here, in a matter of *facta*, Odysseus is upstaged by his future rival.

(c) At the funeral games for Patroclus in Book 23 of the *Iliad*, Ajax

³⁴ Διὶ μῆτιν ἀτάλαντος *Il.* 2.169, *al.*; ποικιλομήτης 11.482; πολύμητις 1.311, 440, 3.200, *al.*; πολυμήχανος 2.173, etc.

³⁵ See 98n.

³⁶ See 63–81n.

and Odysseus compete for the prize in wrestling (700–39). Odysseus is introduced as ‘crafty’ and ‘cunning’ (709).³⁷ After an initial deadlock, Ajax tries to lift Odysseus, who ‘did not forget his guile’ (725) in making Ajax fall backwards; in a second bout they again fall together. Achilles prevents a third bout, and declares the contest a draw (735–7). The rules for the wrestling are never set out, and it is unclear whether Odysseus ends with a technical advantage; but it does look as if he is beginning to get the upper hand. Some have felt that Achilles stops the contest because Ajax is about to lose – see on (a) above for his partiality. In any case, this contest in *facta* seems in some ways to prefigure the contest in *uerba* which in a later poem took place over the arms of Achilles. Wrestling is a trial of strength in which brain can however overcome brawn.

(d) In Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus tells how in the Underworld he met various ghosts, and among them Ajax:

The only soul that stood aloof was that of Ajax son of Telamon. He was still embittered by the defeat I had inflicted on him at the ships in the contest for the arms of Achilles, whose divine mother had offered them as a prize, with the Trojan captives and Pallas for judges. I wish I had never won such a prize – the arms that brought Ajax to his grave, the heroic Ajax, who in looks and valour surpassed all the Danaans [Greeks] except the handsome son of Peleus [Achilles]. I called to him now, and sought to placate him:

‘Ajax, son of noble Telamon; could not even death itself make you forget your anger with me on account of those fatal arms? It was the gods that made them a curse to us Argives. What a tower of strength we lost when you fell! We have never ceased to mourn your death as truly as we lament Achilles, Peleus’ son. No one else is to blame but Zeus, that bitter foe of the Danaan army. He it was who brought you to your doom. Draw near, my lord, and hear what I have to say. Curb your anger and conquer your obstinate pride.’

So I spoke. He made no reply but went away into Erebus to join the souls of the other dead. (11.543–62³⁸)

³⁷ πολύμητις . . . κέρδεα εἰδώς.

³⁸ Trans. Rieu–Rieu–Jones (1991).

Here again Odysseus makes a conciliatory speech, implying regret at having won the arms, carefully avoiding mention of Ajax' inglorious madness and suicide, praising the hero as a 'tower of strength' (556), and attempting to transfer the blame for the affair to Zeus. The speech is no more successful than that which he delivered to Achilles in Ajax' presence (passage (a)) – less so, in fact, since it does not even elicit a reply, and Ajax stalks off in silence. That silence can be read in several ways; but one implication might be that Ajax, not naturally a man of words, is disgusted to hear again the words of Odysseus, which were the instrument of his defeat in the contest over Achilles' arms.³⁹ There is now nothing for him to do, and he has nothing to say.

It is clear from these passages that the contrast between the clever, resourceful, and articulate Odysseus and the brave Ajax of few words is already present in the Homeric poems. Greeks of the sixth and later centuries also had access to a collection of hexameter poems now lost, the so-called Epic Cycle. These works, composed, or at least committed to writing, later than the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, set out to supplement those two poems by recording what occurred before, between, and after the events recorded in them. The contest over the arms of Achilles, alluded to already at *Od.* 11.543–62 (passage (d) above),⁴⁰ was described at length in the *Aethiopis*, a poem designed to follow on from the end of the *Iliad*, and in the *Little Iliad*, which seems to have recorded some of the same events as the *Aethiopis*.⁴¹ We do not know what account of the contest was given in the *Aethiopis*; possibly Trojan prisoners of war were asked to adjudicate.⁴² In the *Little Iliad* scouts were sent under the walls of Troy to eavesdrop on conversations about the bravery of Ajax and Odysseus; they

³⁹ It is assumed here that *δικαζόμενος παρὰ νηυσί* (545) implies a pleading of cases.

⁴⁰ Book 11 is probably a late addition to the *Odyssey*, and line 547 may be even later (it was deleted by the Alexandrian critic Aristarchus); but the addition is likely to predate the Epic Cycle.

⁴¹ Davies (1989) 62–3.

⁴² Schol. on *Il.* 11.547, where *παῖδες Τρώων*, translated 'Trojan captives' by Rieu–Rieu–Jones (1991) but literally meaning 'children of the Trojans', is of uncertain reference.

overheard two girls arguing, the first saying that Ajax was superior because he had carried Achilles' body out of the battle, and the other confuting her by saying that even a woman could carry a burden, but only a great warrior could have fought off the Trojans and covered Ajax' retreat.⁴³ Another version of the story will have had the Greek commanders themselves vote after hearing the respective claims of Ajax and Odysseus;⁴⁴ that is the version followed by most later writers.⁴⁵

The poets of the Epic Cycle presented an Odysseus less admirable than the character depicted in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In the *Cypria* was told the story of his feigning madness in an attempt to avoid war service;⁴⁶ his trick was detected by Palamedes, whose death he later contrived through a false accusation. The *Little Iliad*, as well as relating the contest over the arms, told how, when Odysseus and Diomedes were returning to the Greek camp having stolen from Troy the Palladium, a sacred talisman, Odysseus tried to stab Diomedes in the back in order to take all credit for the escapade for himself.⁴⁷ In the *Sack of Troy* it was Odysseus who committed the barbarous act of killing Astyanax, the infant son of Hector.

When Greek tragic poets composed plays set during the Trojan War, they for the most part drew their plots from the Epic Cycle rather than from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the Odysseus of Greek tragedy is often a cynical and unscrupulous character.⁴⁸ Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and the *Hecuba* of Euripides show him in unprincipled mode, and Euripides' lost *Palamedes* must have been in the same vein. Throughout antiquity Odysseus' complex mixture of abilities and characteristics continued to evoke admiration in some, hostility in others.⁴⁹

Only six lines survive of the play or trilogy of plays by Aeschylus

⁴³ *Little Iliad* F2^A Davies.

⁴⁴ Ovid has an open vote (382 *mota manus procerum est*); Pindar speaks of a secret ballot (*Nem.* 8.26 κρυφίαισι . . . ἐν ψάφοις). Cf. Soph. *Ajax* 1135.

⁴⁵ And this scenario might well be implied by *Od.* 11.545–6, if line 547 is to be deleted.

⁴⁶ See 34–42n.

⁴⁷ For further details of these episodes see 34–42, 38, 105–6nn.

⁴⁸ His portrayal in Sophocles' *Ajax* is, however, an exception.

⁴⁹ Stanford (1963) *passim*.

entitled *The Judgement of Arms*,⁵⁰ which almost certainly included a formal debate between Ajax and Odysseus. Plays entitled *Ajax* or *Ajax mad* are attested for the fourth-century tragedians Astydamas, Carcinus and Theodectas.⁵¹ It may be that, like the *Ajax* of Sophocles, these dealt with the aftermath of the judgement and with Ajax' madness; but Theodectas at least was a well known rhetorician who might be expected to have included a debate scene.⁵²

It was in the second half of the fifth century that the theory and practice of rhetoric became important and controversial topics; from that time until the end of antiquity rhetoric continued to be studied in schools and taught by professionals. An important part of rhetorical education consisted in training speakers to argue both sides of a case with equal facility; and the contest over Achilles' arms provided an ideal setting, sanctioned by the high authority of Homer, for exercises in the schools and for practitioners of rhetoric to display their ingenuity in inventing, arranging, and articulating arguments. One such pair of declamatory speeches survives under the name of Antisthenes (mid fifth to mid fourth cent.), the pupil of Gorgias and friend of Socrates.⁵³ Already in Antisthenes' *Ajax* are found many of the points made against Ulysses in the Ovidian version: the contrast between words and deeds⁵⁴, the charge that Odysseus operates only under cover of darkness (§§3, 6) and that he does nothing openly (§5), the reference to his attempt to avoid conscription (§9), and the scornful observation that he would not dare to wear the arms of Achilles (§3).⁵⁵ Antisthenes' *Odysseus* bears less relation to Ovid's version, and it twice refers rather clumsily to Ajax' future suicide; but Odysseus makes much of his stealing the Palladium (§3) and claims that he alone captured Troy (§14).⁵⁶

Only brief fragments remain of Roman tragedies on the theme:

⁵⁰ Ὀπλων κρίσις; *TGF* F 174–8 Radt. See 31–2n.

⁵¹ *TGF* 60 F 1a, 70 F 1a, 72 F 1 Snell.

⁵² *TGF* 72 T 1 = Suidas θ 138, II 692 Adler.

⁵³ Radermacher (1951) 122–6; Giannantoni (1990) II 157–61.

⁵⁴ §1 ποῖα τις ἂν δίκη δικαστῶν ... γένοιτο ... διὰ λόγων; τὸ δὲ πρᾶγμα ἐγίγνετο ἔργῳ, §7.

⁵⁵ See lines 9–12, 15, 34–42, 63–5, 92, 100–16.

⁵⁶ Cf. lines 333–49, especially 349 *Pergama tunc uici, cum uinci posse coegi* ~ Antisth. §14 μόνον [ἐμὲ] τὴν Τροίαν ἐλόντα.

Ennius (third/second century) composed an *Ajax*, Pacuvius (second century) and Accius (second/first century) plays entitled *Armorum iudicium*. The influence of Republican tragedy on Ovid is a controversial subject,⁵⁷ but some verbal similarities between his version and the surviving fragments are mentioned in the notes on lines 3–4, 19–20, 31, 37, 52–4, 54, 83 and 410.

Topics for debate, in Latin called *controversiae*, were a staple feature of Roman as of Greek rhetorical education, and the contest over the arms no doubt continued to provide practice for debate. We know that Ovid included a particularly felicitous idea from one of his teachers, M. Porcius Latro, at the end of Ajax' speech (120–3n.). Most of the points made by the two speakers will have seemed commonplaces; and it is noteworthy that neither is made to go into any detail about the recovery of the arms and of the body of Achilles.⁵⁸ It is the way in which Ovid has characterised Ajax and Ulysses, and his choice and ordering of their arguments, that are of prime importance.

Rhetorical aspects of the speeches

Professional rhetoricians brought method to the art of good speaking, but they were not the first to speak well. Greek and Roman handbooks acknowledge Homer to be the fount and source of all excellence in speaking⁵⁹ and detect already in Homer the three styles of eloquence, the grand, the middle and the simple,⁶⁰ identified by some with Ulysses, Nestor and Menelaus respectively: Ulysses, according to Quintilian, was supremely eloquent, having *magnitudo uocis, uis orationis, copia uerborum* and *impetus*.⁶¹ However, the same author concedes that the best speakers will use all three styles as appropriate; orators

⁵⁷ See Currie (1981) 2721, 2725–6.

⁵⁸ Nor indeed does Ovid in his summary of events at the end of Book 12. Ulysses briefly gives details (which are open to question) at lines 280–5.

⁵⁹ Quint. 10.1.46–51.

⁶⁰ Called *grauis*, *mediocris* and *attenuata* at *Ad Her.* 4.11; see the note of Caplan (1954) for a brief discussion of their origin.

⁶¹ Quint. 12.10.64. On the contrast between the styles of Menelaus and Ulysses see 125–7n.

must above all select the style and presentation most likely to be effective in the circumstances.⁶² In particular, a stylistic distinction is to be made between the emotional and the intellectual, between those speeches aimed at exciting a crowd and those designed to elicit the considered approval of senators or judges.⁶³ In Ovid's version of the Judgement of Arms, one reason for Ulysses' victory is that he addresses himself to those who will decide the issue, while Ajax appeals to the rank and file, who have no vote.⁶⁴ Some have seen Ajax' speech as bad, characterising him as a dolt and a thug;⁶⁵ but it would be surprising if it were obviously inferior to that of Ulysses, since the whole point of rhetorical exercises of this kind was to produce the best possible arguments for each side. The difference is not so much of matter as of manner: Ajax' speech is good of its kind, but its kind is the wrong kind.⁶⁶

Each claimant states his case and criticises his opponent. Although Ulysses puts forward some claims to be a man of action, the contest is at bottom one between deeds and words, action and counsel, brain and brawn, indirect and direct influence on events.⁶⁷ What have to be evaluated are the relative merits of often unheroic but vitally necessary actions on one hand and heroically direct action on the other. Both are indispensable, and the choice between them is invidious. That the contest is conducted through the medium of words gives a decisive advantage to Ulysses: he is seen using on his own behalf that persuasive power which he so often put at the service of the Greeks. Is he wise, or merely clever? Is his speech more than a *tour de force* of advocacy? Ovid makes no unequivocal judgement on the matter. His brief verdict is *quid facundia posset | re patuit, fortisque uiri tulit arma disertus* (382–3). It is possible to see here a continuation

⁶² Quint. 12.10.69; cf. Cic. *Orator* 24, 100–1, 123 *is erit ergo eloquens, qui ad id quodcumque decebit poterit accommodare orationem*, *De orat.* 3.212.

⁶³ Cic. *Brutus* 164–5, *Orator* 21, Quint. 11.1.45 *quis uero nesciat quanto aliud dicendi genus poscat grauitas senatoria, aliud aura popularis?*

⁶⁴ Cf. 2, 123 *uulgi* ~ 126 *proceres*, 382; cf. 111.

⁶⁵ Bömer (1982) 199 lists those critics.

⁶⁶ Bömer thinks the transition in line 63 forced, and *amico* in line 69 unfortunate in the context; but these hardly seem to be obtrusively clumsy.

⁶⁷ The fundamental contrast between *facta* and *uerba* (9–12) is complemented by that between *ficta* and *uera* (9, 67).

of the contrast drawn by Ajax between deeds and mere words,⁶⁸ but also to see an admiring reference to the power of eloquence. Many ancient readers, products themselves of an education in rhetoric, will have enjoyed the contrasting performances without feeling a need to decide between them; some modern readers will reach a preference using the criteria of the *uulgus* or the *procures*. But Ovid's works are not written for the *uulgus*, and his range, cleverness and verbal dexterity make him in some ways a complement to Ulysses.⁶⁹ Ajax is characterised as the traditional no-nonsense hero, conservative, die-hard, entrenched, durable and intransigent – not a person to welcome change. Ulysses' very faults, by contrast, aid his success. Ajax characterises him as changeable, shifty, inconstant, pliable, slippery, and tergiversatory.⁷⁰ Who fitter to win victory in a new and sophisticated poem about metamorphosis?

Ajax

A passage of Quintilian casts interesting light on Ajax' performance:

ne hoc quidem negauerim, sequi plerumque hanc opinionem, ut fortius dicere uideantur indocti, primum uitio male iudicantium, qui maiorem habere uim credunt ea quae non habent artem, ut effringere quam aperire, rumpere quam soluere, trahere quam ducere putant robustius. nam et gladiator, qui armorum inscius in rixam ruit et luctator, qui totius corporis nisu in id quod semel inuasit incumbit fortior ab his uocatur; cum interim et hic frequenter suis uiribus ipse prosternitur et illum uehementis impetus excipit aduersarii mollis articulus.

I must, however, admit that the general opinion is that the untrained speaker is usually the more vigorous. The opinion is due primarily to the erroneous judgement of faulty critics, who

⁶⁸ Or even possibly to refer *fortisque uiri* to Ajax: 'Ulysses carried off the arms which ought to have been granted to Ajax.'

⁶⁹ See Otis (1970) 285, Duc (1994) 130–1.

⁷⁰ Cf. 81, 112, 115, and especially 224 *cum tu terga dares*, 237 *dantem terga*, where the accusation is turned against Ajax.

think that true vigour is all the greater for its lack of art, regarding it as a special proof of strength to force what might be opened, to break what might be untied and to drag what might be led. Even a gladiator who plunges into the fight with no skill at arms to help him, and a wrestler who puts forth the whole strength of his body the moment he has got a hold, is acclaimed by them for his outstanding vigour, although it is of frequent occurrence in such cases for the latter to be overthrown by his own strength and for the former to find the fury of his onslaught parried by his adversary with a simple turn of the wrist. (*Inst. orat.* 2.12.1–2⁷¹)

The *indocti* – Ovid’s *uulgi* ... *corona* (1) – prefer the vigour of an unpractised speaker more like themselves; but force without art is often not enough. The image from wrestling is particularly apt in the light of *Il.* 23.700–39, where cunning Odysseus throws the brawny Ajax (passage (b) above).⁷² In the case of Ajax, the style is the man:⁷³ Ovid represents him as direct and straight-talking, as befits a warrior,⁷⁴ but also as a forceful and violent speaker who can barely control his passions – the denouement of the story, his madness and suicide, are thus foreshadowed in his speech.⁷⁵ He is by no means deficient in rhetorical power, however.⁷⁶ Although he begins with disconcerting

⁷¹ Trans. Butler (1921–2). Cf. Quint. 11.3.10–11 (some think the *rudis* to be *fortior* as a speaker).

⁷² That similarity may be more than coincidence: if Homer is the fountainhead of rhetoric, then those who wrote rhetorical theory may be expected to have had Homer constantly in mind when defining figures and types of style. To that extent, there is an element of circularity in showing that Ajax and Ulysses are effective orators: the fact that they are speaking in a hexameter epic poem means that they will express themselves in language already influenced by epic (= ‘rhetorical’) language. This qualification does not, however, mean that it is impossible to distinguish between the two: differences of emphasis exist within the overall rhetorical framework of Ovidian style.

⁷³ Quint. 11.1.30 *Graeci prodiderunt, ut uiuat, quemque etiam dicere*.

⁷⁴ Quint. 11.1.32 *simpliciora militares decent*.

⁷⁵ Quint. 7.4.31 *ira et concitatio furori sunt similia*; Nisbet–Hubbard (1970) on Hor. *Carm.* 1.16.5.

⁷⁶ He is, for example, given no solecisms or obvious awkwardnesses of expression (see n. 66).

vehemence, which is perhaps a miscalculation,⁷⁷ his first words are powerful enough to merit citation by Quintilian as a good example of the ‘argument from place’,⁷⁸ and he employs effectively arguments and figures recommended by the handbooks: the establishment of good character on the basis of one’s ancestors,⁷⁹ the use of irony and sarcasm,⁸⁰ rhetorical questions,⁸¹ strikingly phrased or paradoxical ideas at period-end (*sententiae*),⁸² and exclamation by way of climax (*epiphōnema*).⁸³ The disproportion and lack of organisation of his speech make it a character-study (*ēthopoiā*) in indignation.

Ulysses

Speaking second, Ulysses can counter Ajax’ charges and make his own without contradiction.⁸⁴ According to Quintilian, however, refutation is more difficult than accusation, partly because the accuser has a specific and simple charge to make, while ‘the defence requires a thousand arts and variations’;⁸⁵ ‘consequently’, he continues, ‘quite moderate speakers have proved adequate in prosecution, while no one can be a good counsel for the defence unless he possesses real eloquence’.⁸⁶ The ‘arts and variations’ required in a reply such as this are Ulyssean characteristics. As was observed above, the two speeches differ more in manner than in rhetorical skill. There is nothing extraordinary about the arrangement of Ulysses’ material: after a brief exordium (lacking in Ajax’ more emotional speech) he replies to Ajax’ first developed point (21–33), the charge of dubious

⁷⁷ Cic. *De orat.* 1.119 ‘even the best orators . . . unless they are diffident in approaching a discourse and diffident in beginning it, seem to border on the shameless’; *Ad Her.* 3.22 *quid insuavius quam clamor in exordio causae?* Cf. 125–7n.

⁷⁸ Quint. 5.10.40–1; see 5–8n.

⁷⁹ Lines 21–33; Quint. 5.10.24.

⁸⁰ Quint. 6.2.15, 8.6.56–7.

⁸¹ Quint. 9.2.7–16.

⁸² Lines 19–20, 41–2, 62, 97, etc.; Quint. 8.5.1–34.

⁸³ Line 122; Quint. 8.5.11.

⁸⁴ In real cases, according to Quintilian, the order was decided ‘either by some brutally rigid formula, or by the character of the suit, or finally by lot’ (7.1.37).

⁸⁵ Quint. 5.13.2 (*mille flexus et artes desiderantur*).

⁸⁶ Quint. 5.13.3.